

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 345

UD 024 614

AUTHOR Reddick, Lawrence D.
TITLE Wisdom and Courage Can Often Prevent Horrible Consequences.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 12p.; In: Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka: An Assessment Thirty Years Later (Institute, West Virginia, February 10-11 and April 11-13, 1984). For proceedings, see UD 024 606.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Colleges; Black Education; *College Desegregation; Curriculum Development; *Desegregation Effects; Higher Education; Racial Balance; *Racial Integration; Racial Relations
IDENTIFIERS Lincoln University MO; *West Virginia State College

ABSTRACT

Changes undergone by two formerly all-black colleges since the Brown decision are described in this anecdotal conference paper. Lincoln University (Jefferson City, Mo), once an outstanding liberal arts institution, has been transformed into a school that is now predominantly white and serves students who wish to qualify for jobs in fields such as nursing, food preparation, data processing, and merchandising. These changes have produced racial tension and great dissatisfaction to Blacks who remember Lincoln's former status. Next, similar effects of integration at West Virginia State College are detailed. West Virginia State has also become largely concentrated on vocational training. The end of liberal arts as central curriculum is a great loss for the Black students, community, and alumni, and indicative of a lack of concern for the futures of Black citizens. The Brown decision is to blame for these changes: although it represented a stride toward equality, the way this ruling was implemented was quite different from the intent of the court. (KH)

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WISDOM AND COURAGE CAN OFTEN PREVENT HORRIBLE
CONSEQUENCES

Lawrence D. Reddick
Distinguished Scholar in Residence
Dillard University

Presented at the Symposium celebrating Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court Decision of 1954 (Institute, WV, February 10-11 and April 11-13, 1984).

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Lawrence D. Reddick
Distinguished Scholar in Residence,
Dillard University

Some of you may remember E. Franklin Frazier. He was my teacher some years ago. He was filled with humor and sophistication. For a while he was a specialist on race relations for the School of Social Work in Atlanta.

From time to time he would be invited by some small town in the Deep South to come and make an analysis on how to improve Black and white people getting along with each other.

Frazier would accept such invitations only if the written agreement for his lecture would include the arrangement that nobody in the meeting would leave the room, for 15 minutes, after he had made his speech and departed. This would give him time to get into his automobile and get out of town before any listener, who might have been upset by Frazier's remarks, could stop him.

I have a feeling that if I am to speak frankly today, maybe I, too, should have a 15-minute headstart to jump into a waiting taxi and speed off to the airport. But if you declare that you believe in non-violence, I will stay around for another day to answer your questions or debate alternatives.

What I will tell you is briefly what I observed and experienced on visits to three college campuses: one in Missouri, another in West Virginia, and a third in Mississippi. My thesis is that Wisdom and Courage can often prevent horrible consequences, and that the absence of such an endeavor may result in destruction.

LINCOLN

First, I wanted a good look into a predominately Black college, not one in the Deep South, but one that was almost "up North" and that was outstanding in

scholarship. My initial stop was Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. I arrived at the campus about lunchtime and as I looked around I saw so many white persons that I asked if some nearby other college was visiting Lincoln that day. No, I was informed, that "our Black student population here, these days is about 15%." "Only 15%," I repeated.

I could have fainted. The Lincoln that I had known through the years was an outstanding Liberal Arts institution that was often called a "Black Harvard." Its faculty was composed of scholars such as Lorenzo Greene, Oliver Cox, Bit McGraw and W. Sherman Savage, who had written the history of Lincoln when it was famous. In my days as a student at Fisk, I was on several teams that debated Lincoln. We seldom won.

What happened, I asked myself. The answer came back, "You know, since May 17, 1954, we have had an influx of light-skinned people." I smiled and asked "and did the University of Missouri that has always had a great majority of white students, did it, after the famous decision of the U. S. Supreme Court generate an influx of Black students there to keep the colors balanced?" Everybody laughed then. Finally, somebody said, "Only a few Black tokens."

And so I spent several days at Lincoln University. I consulted with everyone, including the college President, faculty members, new as well as old timers and students; Blacks and a few whites who would linger for only a few moments, and campus workers. The overwhelming influx was not of students who wanted to obtain a liberal arts education; rather they were mostly young and not so young white women, often with families, who wanted to qualify for jobs of sorts, relative to nursing, food preparation, data processing and merchandising. Their interest was strictly vocational--jobs and promotions.

They usually lived in the town or in a nearby county. They would drive to the campus each morning for their classes. If they should have afternoon assignments, they would bring along a sandwich in a paper bag, out of which they would

munch their lunches, sitting in their automobiles. They were almost always smiling as they moved about the campus. After classes were over, they hurried home. They seldom remained or came back for evening affairs--dramas, musicals, and exhibits. Clearly, their contact with the college was largely economic. They seldom "socialized" as we used to call it.

The Black students were largely irritated by this touch-and-go daily inflow and exflow. They felt helpless. They could get little suggestion or guidance from faculty or administration; but they could see these newcomers swarm in and then swarm out, after they got what they wanted.

The administration was almost completely silent, insisting, "We must obey the law; the courts." At times an old-timer would speak out strongly; soon afterwards, he would be notified that nobody was insisting that he remain with Lincoln...there were many other jobs and colleges.

But now and then something would happen that came near setting fire. Lincoln had been originated by Black Civil Warriors who had fought with the Yankees. After the war was over, the soldiers "chipped in" their paychecks in order to get a school for themselves and their families. In honor of this, an impressive tower was erected at the campus entry. But one morning, the campus awakened to discover that the tower had been dismembered and "torn down." The campus males were ready to "beat the hell out of whoever was responsible." The finger pointed to white workers on campus. They replied that it was all a misunderstanding. Reluctantly, the Blacks accepted this explanation. The "authorities" promised that the tower would be restored. But it was never rebuilt. Students confessed that this was the turning point--where manhood was tested and apparently sacrificed. More than one person said that the present faculty, students and members of the overseers would not resist the absorption of Lincoln University.

Not only was there a decline in the teaching but also in the ability to gather supporters. Somebody said that manhood seemed to be seeping away.

Newcomers, filled with ambition and energy, were taking over and were handling the money and pushing forward new techniques in management. The authorities were good enough to let me read recent official reports. I came to the conclusion that two white women were pushing forward for a new command of the economic machinery of the whole institution.

POWER SHIFT?

Any passing visitor could see that Lincoln University looked different from what it once was...the white faces, crowded parking lots...small liberal arts classes but overflowing nurse training and business classes. But behind and underneath these surface changes, was anything really happening? More specifically, beyond the formality of regular faculty meetings, who actually was calling the "shots?" Was anybody "taking over," directly or indirectly?

The most revealing answer to such questions perhaps was provided in the University report for the year 1979-80. This 64-page document told us much more than the simple external facts on each sector of the institution. This comprehensive report was prepared by the university's Office of Planning and Analysis. This was essentially a data processing service which normally would be expected to quantify factual statements and plans of the functioning units of the college. But this office apparently had greater ideas, stating that this "activity is intended to improve both the transactional procedures that generate data and the processing and communication of data information, especially as that information would strengthen Lincoln's planning, management, and evaluation capability." This latter function, of course, is a considerable expansion beyond record keeping.

Even this step was not all, for the next paragraph of the report extended the scope to "improve planning and decision making at Lincoln, and the Office of Planning and Analysis/PME activity has been implemented.

One Black staff member who had given her academic life for Lincoln, decided that she would give up her position. Her pain was so great that she could not bear it any longer. One of her colleagues was comparatively optimistic. "Maybe," he said, "the white and Black curators at the University of Missouri and Lincoln today are to see that every right and privilege that white students enjoy at the University of Missouri would be fully available to our students and faculty and administration on both campuses; but nobody seemed to have a concrete plan to bring it about." Tears could not be restrained.

More recently, the President of the college has resigned and accepted a post with a high level regional athletic organization in the Southeast.

Lincoln University, once a symbol of the best in higher education of Black Americans is actually, "no more;" but the University of Missouri is still a "white fortress."

WEST VIRGINIA STATE

On my way to West Virginia, I remembered that as a youngster, I liked the western part of old Virginia when the people there decided not to join the Confederacy. And when the Civil War was over, there was a new state in the nation--West Virginia. Its people were less of the aristocracy, more of the "common man" type. They were slow but they got around to sharing with Blacks the right to vote and to an education.

On March 17, 1891, the West Virginia legislature authorized a West Virginia Colored Institute. From that it grew and in the old catalogs the story of a steady progress was related. But in 1919, a "wonderful" man came upon the scene who was a combination of "brains plus heart." This was John W. Davis. He was very much of whatever the institution became up to 1953.

Davis was a "Morehouse Man." He saw the need and the possibility of converting the local institute into a national institution. For example, he gathered

a faculty that included such scholars and creative thinkers, speakers, and writers as Dr. Carter G. Woodson, David A. Lane, Thomas E. Posey, Herman C. Canady, Harry W. Greene and Dr. Naomi Garrett and many others, including Professor John C. Harlan, who wrote the History of West Virginia (very valuable, please let me add). These dedicated scholars and creators had produced as early as 1939 some 36 books and more than a hundred articles and bulletins. The students of these instructors responded to the highest academic standards and were articulate on racial and world problems. As early as 1927 the college was fully accredited.

Hon. H. N. Bradley, President of the State of Board of Control was candid enough to state in writing that "The West Virginia State College is to the Negro people of West Virginia just what West Virginia University is to the white people...No state possibly in the Union has approached this in such a fair, just and righteous manner as our beloved state..."

Horace Mann Bond candidly put it this way: "West Virginia State College is certainly the first of our state supported colleges and perhaps the first of any of our colleges to establish progressive movements which have had a profound influence on the higher education of Negroes in this country...revitalizing the intellectual and cultural life of West Virginia. Its influence has extended far beyond the borders of West Virginia." Everybody wanted to come and see the wondrous W. V. S. College, including Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Mrs. Mary McCleod Bethune and Henry Ford.

The college had the aid and protection of a Black Advisory to the Board of Education, that then had considerable clout. And would you believe it, from 29 states, students who would have to pay because they were not residents of West Virginia, begged and came and paid extra to become a student at West Virginia State College.

President John W. Davis demonstrated his rapport with his students when he let them initiate him into their so called fraternity. His appreciation of

their comradery was so gentle that the silver dollar that they presented to him at his initiation, he kept in his pocket everyday of the rest of his life.

This college was about as near to academic heaven as one could get. Truly, as the college sang: "Dear old West Virginia...we love you so..." Only at Fisk and Morehouse could singing be so moving. This indeed was a creative and intellectual "heaven." But alas, as in many dramas, something had to come along to spoil everything. That something was the May 17, 1954 decision of the U. S. Supreme Court that the forcible separation of students by race anywhere in the nation was contrary to the Constitution of the United States of America. Apparently, this was a giant stride toward equality. But the way this ruling was implemented and distorted was something very different from the intent of the Court.

In some places, there was massive resistance. The Chief Justice was condemned and publicly ridiculed. For a while, it looked as though we might have another secession from the United States of America, one more attempt to establish a Confederacy. But some newspapers took a more clever approach, proposing "Integration in Reverse" or "Desegregation in Reverse." Some of the radio and TV stations threw in their support. This entertaining approach would not often add Black students to previously all-white schools; rather, white students would be added to previously Black schools. Would not this flatter the Black institutions? Moreover, no Black schools would be closed down.

Apparently, the West Virginia Board of Control was delighted with this idea. Immediately, somebody went to work searching for more white teachers. Some of the newcomers were part-timers; others had no background or education in Black Studies, but the money was attractive. There was also emerging a different balance of power.

The next move was to rewrite the college catalog. White faces began to outnumber Black faces. The following was typical of photograph imbalance:

CATALOG PHOTOS

1. Under the caption "How to Enroll" there were more whites than Blacks.
2. A "shot" of the assembly gives a closeup on the whites.
3. White students at the tables in the cafeteria; a few Blacks in the background.
4. Attractive young white woman, with modern hair style, looks quietly through a window to a tranquil campus scene.
5. A white student and a white professor examine a picture.
6. An elderly, light-skinned Black teacher or artist points out a picture to nine students; two or three of them seem to be Black.
7. Two students, one white, the other Black, look at an electric machine.
8. A Black teacher draws the attention of Black and white students to a blackboard.
9. A dormitory scene in which two whites and two Black students smile and chat.
10. A lone Black student is in a lab of some sort.
11. The college President smiles as a trophy is shown to him by five co-eds, three of whom are white.

As if the photos and general invitations were not enough, the course offerings were retailored for the newcomers. The Black emphasis courses were at first dropped; but in a later catalog, somewhat restored; but were over-balanced by courses dealing with the history and culture of Appalachia and other minorities in America and the world; and also a special offering on West Virginia's history, geography, and government.

All along, the state powers cultivated the myth that the coming of white students to the college was spontaneous; thus concealing the campaign to attract and bring them in...The telephone answering secretaries in the college offices were firmly instructed to be encouraging whenever someone called and asked, "I happen to be white...Is it alright for me to come to your school and enroll?"

The headline of the move was "WVSC FUTURE OUTLINED." It was published in the Stinger, a newsletter for "alumni and friends," that the college would continue to offer "liberal arts" but that it was pushing forward as a multi-purpose institution. The Kanawha Valley was described as a major center of the chemical industry and that Charleston was the primary city in the state for "these factors define the immediate community that the college should and does serve." Moreover, "the college has an obligation to evolve a curriculum that promises maximum success for the kinds of students it serves." Apparently, nobody was listening...

FINAL TAKE

No doubt the ultimate loss to the Black students, community and alumni was the conversion of the curriculum of the college from what it had been historically. It was bad enough to outnumber Blacks with whites, but the final "take" was to discard what the college Blacks had come to study for their life careers. The undoing of the liberal arts education was to satisfy urban economics and technology. This meant the production of clerks, salesmen, accountants, money managers, insurance and marketing experts, elementary chemists, secretaries, textiles fashion designers, hotel/motel operators; and nurseries to take care of children while their parents were at work. And finally, such trained protectives as police, security and correctional officers. These became increasingly the objectives of developing an industrial and commercial world that centered about the state's capital city of Charleston.

Of course, a separate training institution could have been created. But it would have cost about \$10 billion. Why spend all that money when the Blacks had the physical plant that could be quietly taken from them and converted to more urgent needs of the majority? This coincided with the expressed wishes of many of the whites who lived in the Kanawha Valley. A considerable number enrolled in

late afternoon and early evening classes in order to retain or get themselves a job in the Charleston area.

Thus year by year the catalogs had been disclosing that the college was increasingly vocational. It's day of service was done. History had been twisted when the catalog said that since 1954, the college has attracted a racially and culturally diverse student body. The simple fact was that Black students had faded to only 10 percent of the whole. They could join the whites as handy helpers. Otherwise, nobody was deeply concerned as to their future.

I could read the four paragraphs that were in the bulletin, but to save time, I would only say that it emphasized that the Community College Component was the main concern of the university. About 4,000 students were studying at the college in both day and night programs. It did not add that only a fraction of these were Blacks.

I think my time is almost up and if in terms of responding to your questions I may get a chance to say why I believe this could have been averted. So I'll leave it at that at this moment.

A precious few of them would be given minor posts in business and industry; but the main work force and all of the managers would be capable whites.

The 1981 catalog of the college was frank. Under the introductory caption "Mission," the honest statement was made that the Community College Component had become the center piece of the institution. The four paragraphs that followed were crystal clear.